

TAKEOVER

The strange affair of the James Bond novel Ian Fleming 'wrote' six years after his death—and, incidentally, of an unlikely assortment of other writers planning their posthumous 'works'

By Peter Fleming



ONE DAY IN OCTOBER, 1970 I received a short typewritten letter from an address in Hertfordshire. "I have," wrote Mr A, "some very unusual and I believe pleasurable news concerning your late brother Ian which I should like to discuss with you." He felt that "it is of the utmost importance that you are consulted, as the personal feelings of you and your family must, I consider, be respected." He had no wish to be "vague or mysterious," but when he had explained the situation I would understand his reasons for not taking the matter any further in a letter.

Ian had been dead for six years. It was not easy to imagine what "news" about him Mr A might have, and the bit about the need to respect my personal feelings was faintly ominous. I sent him a rather frigid postcard, asking him to ring me up. On the telephone Mr A, who sounded a nice man, declined to reveal anything more of the matter in hand, but a meeting was arranged for the following Sunday morning.

He arrived punctually. There was a woman in the car with him, but he left her there and came in alone. Mr A turned out to be a retired bank officer aged 73—gentle, sincere, with a rather ascetic appearance but a cheerful manner. He handed me a neat but bulky typescript on the cover of which was written *Take Over: a James Bond thriller* and gave me his account of its provenance: Mr A's wife died three years

ago. One day in December, 1969, his daughter, Vera, was recovering from an illness. She had a writing-pad in front of her; her eye caught a framed photograph of her mother; she thought "I wish you could write me a letter, Mum"; and immediately the pen in her hand started to write, with difficulty, "I love you Vera."

Thus began a correspondence from which Mr A and Vera derived much comfort. Mrs A gave glowing though rather imprecise accounts of life in the next world and often displayed knowledge of small terrestrial events (such as which television programmes Mr A had been watching the night before) of which Vera, living twelve miles away from her father, could have had no cognisance. The process of automatic writing, hesitant at first, grew steadily more fluent; the handwriting, ceasing to be a scrawl, became Mrs A's, which among other notable differences slopes in the opposite direction from her daughter's.

In May, 1970 Mrs A, in a long message which has some of the hallmarks of a "prepared statement," revealed that among her fellow-spirits were a number of authors, all of them eager to continue their careers by dictating to Vera, through her late mother, the texts of novels or (as later appeared) short stories which they had put together after passing on.

Between May 5 and 11 six authors transmitted to Vera, always in her mother's handwriting, what may not unfairly be called manifestos, each running to about 500 words. The authors were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, H G Wells,

Edgar Wallace, Ruby M Ayres, Ian Fleming and Somerset Maugham. (Miss Ayres later dropped out of the syndicate, on promotion to a "Higher Plane." Her place was taken by Bernard Shaw, who once chided Mr A for mispronouncing Androcules; it should, he insisted, be "Androcules"). All shared a common purpose, thus summarised by Somerset Maugham: "I am hoping that, given time, I shall be one of the fortunate spirits who will be allowed to write through this (Vera's) hand something which cannot conceivably be disputed as being my own work and if this can be achieved then people on earth will surely believe we live on after 'death' and that life goes on and very pleasantly I can assure you."

The five other authors took the same line; they hoped that, if they could go on writing and (presumably) this crucial problem was never mentioned, getting published, people would "come to believe in the amenities of what used to be called the Hereafter, and would lose their fear of death."

Textually, there are two points worth noting about these manifestos (perhaps "trailers" would be a more descriptive word). The first is that they include words which, as her husband and daughter agree, would have been outside the scope of Mrs A's vocabulary: "evaluate," "compulsive," "impervious" and "eminent" are examples. The second is a certain homogeneity between the styles of the six authors. It is true that Ruby M Ayres mentions, as a spirit of her sex might be expected to, the fact that "physical love is not practised here," and that Edgar Wallace, unlike any of the others, reveals something of his domestic circumstances ("I have a beautiful house and grounds and all my books are around me and many more that have never been read by mortals"). But on the whole the impression produced is, not of six disparate and talented personalities expressing themselves, but of one second-rate mind speaking—allegedly—for them.

Ian Fleming's contribution is particularly untrue to life. Not only does he, like Maugham, use the adjective "pleasurable"—a word which I feel sure neither of them employed except in a context of mild parody—but it is inconceivable that he would ever have used the words "another thrilling and gripping story about this romantic rogue 007" to describe his project for a posthumous addition to the James Bond saga.

I NOW—GOING BACK TO MY first interview with Mr A and his daughter, who had joined us from the car—held in my hands the 60,000-word end-product of that project; for in the foreword to *Take Over* Ian revealed that he had been chosen to be the first author to use the highly efficient transmission-channel represented by Vera and her late mother. These were, he admitted, "very unusual circumstances" in which to write a book; but he added—again with an uncharacteristic choice of verbiage—that although "some of you will scoff and say, Balderdash, others will believe me."

While Mr A was explaining the origins of *Take Over* I had been glancing through the typescript. When opportunity offered I said mildly that it did not sound very like Ian; he would not for instance have described a room in a private house, however villainous its occupant, as a "lounge." Vera, who was sitting with a pad on her knee, almost immediately wrote, in her mother's handwriting: "Mr Fleming says Peter is perfectly correct in saying I do not use the word lounge."

Impressed by the prompt establishment of what seemed to be some sort of rapport, I asked if Ian had a message for me. "Mr Fleming says he is very pleased to be

here with his brother and sends greetings."

I had not, before Mr A arrived twenty minutes earlier, been prepared for a dialogue with the Spirit World, but my first impulse was to check the bona fides of my extra-terrestrial correspondent, about which, as I thumbed through more and more pages of *Take Over*, I became increasingly sceptical. I asked five more questions:

What was his second Christian name? "Lancaster."

What was his son's second Christian name? "Robert." (Both these answers were correct; both could have been answered correctly by a close reader of *The Life of Ian Fleming* by John Pearson, which was published in London and New York in 1966.)

What were his house-colours at Eton? "Blue and yellow. No. Blue and red. No. I can't do it." (The right answer was cerise and grey.)

Does he remember the name of the boy who broke his nose? "Yes." (Pause.) "Bertram." (It was Henry Douglas-Home, a brother of Sir Alec.)

Does he remember the Russian for Yes (Da)? Pause. Two squiggles. "scap. Please for give me I cannot get this over."

By this time I had read what was claimed to be one of the most exciting chapters in *Take Over*, and I told Mr A that with the best will in the world I could not recognise my brother's style. Vera at once wrote: "He realises the book is not his style but hopes to be able eventually to get this over correctly although it may take time."

After further discussion of the background to this strange affair my visitors departed, leaving with me what must be one of the oddest typescripts ever produced.

TAKE OVER DEPLOYS IN A reasonably competent manner most of the stock Bond characters and stage-properties—M, Universal Exports, Miss Moneybags and the rest of the 007 set-up; it has the sort of preposterous, cosmic storyline (involving a poisonous gas which will enable its users to dominate the world) which might have occurred to Ian. It is, however, although action-packed, implausible and silly; the style is a tasteless pastiche of the original; and sex nowhere rears its ugly head.

This omission is explained by a passage in what might be called the "service traffic." Vera, while taking (so to speak) dictation of the narrative, always kept a separate pad for corrections, amendments or personal messages from her mother which sometimes interrupted the main transmission. Typical "service traffic" items are "Mr Fleming says we must also alter that part where Bond hears water lapping as that is not right as he is too high up to hear it from his room," and "Yes, this part has to be altered owing to the change in plan of the balloons. Write as follows:—"

The message dealing with sex reads: "We can't put much of that nature in this book as it would be frowned on by spiritualists and our Higher Spirits. I'm glad you understand. He says he used to put this type of thing in some of his books to attract readers who liked that sort of thing."

Whatever its literary shortcomings, *Take Over* represents, in quantitative terms, a formidable achievement. Vera had a full-time job, a house to run and an ailing husband (since dead) from whom for a long time she kept secret her contacts with the Spirit World. In these circumstances to take down—in five months and in somebody

else's handwriting—the text of a 60,000-word thriller was an extraordinary feat; she admits that she found it a heavy strain and Mrs A seems, from the "service traffic," to have been aware of this ("You had better do your potatoes and shopping now dear and perhaps we can continue later on"). Nor did the completion of *Take Over* mark the end of her stint.

WHEN THEY GOT HOME AFTER our first meeting Mr A and his daughter, understandably disappointed by my scepticism, attempted to get in direct touch with Ian Fleming, by-passing Mrs A. The results were unsatisfactory, but when Ian was asked to transmit his signature his autograph appeared on Vera's pad and was then—without a request for an encore—reproduced in triplicate. All these signatures are bold and faithful near-replicas of one which appears on page 324 of Pearson's biography. A fifth was later reproduced in my presence and without apparent effort, when I asked for it. (Five other authors obliged with their autographs, but none bore much resemblance to the originals.)

Shortly after this, on November 3, 1970, the authors began to transmit Tales of Mystery and Imagination. In the following two months Edgar Wallace wrote five, H G Wells and Ian Fleming two each, Conan Doyle and Somerset Maugham one each: a total of some 30,000 words. All are crude essays in Grand Guignol, scarcely differentiated in style and devoid of literary merit.

At the end of January 1971 Mrs A began transmitting to Vera the second full-length work produced by the Spirit World: a novel, as yet untitled, by Somerset Maugham. To give some idea of the extent to which Maugham's style has altered, and his literary craftsmanship deteriorated, since his death in 1965 it is necessary only to quote the opening sentence: "Hope and fear continuously cantered in and out of my uncertain mind as I gazed from the open latticed window upon the scurrying, fluttering, eddying autumn leaves caught and twirled hither and thither by the wind."

After she had taken down a few thousand words of this tosh—I am afraid there is no other word for it—Vera's life was overtaken by tragedy; her husband died suddenly. Since then her automatic writings have been largely devoted to correspondence with him—a source of great solace to her.

WHAT IS ONE TO MAKE OF THIS strange business?

Before trying to answer this question, I must make it clear that I rule out any question of chicanery by Mr A, whom I have seen three times, or his daughter, who was present on two of these occasions. They are both persons of complete integrity, deeply interested in the network of communications of which they have become the focus but motivated only by the desire to prove—or to help their correspondents prove—that life continues after death, and in a very agreeable manner. Neither has any literary leanings (nor had the late Mrs A) or is qualified by intellect or education to produce even the inferior fiction for which they have acted as a channel of transmission. If I had to choose a single epithet to describe their attitude to the whole affair I think it would be "guileless."

Having made that plain, with what facts are we left? The most striking fact, surely, is that in eight months—between May 1970 and February 1971—some form of intelligence caused Vera to write down, in her mother's handwriting, over 100,000 words of fiction and a great deal of subsidiary matter and to reproduce with remarkable verisimilitude the signature of one of the authors involved. However

you look at it, a lot of energy was at work here.

The motives of the "spirits" are straightforward and laudable; they seek to convince us that the Next World is a blissful, care-free place. Their methods are more questionable, involving as they do what amounts—in earthly terms, at any rate—to imposture and forgery. I find it impossible to believe that my late brother had any part in the compilation of *Take Over* (the opening chapters of which, incidentally, are set in a part of Europe which he never visited); and I feel certain that "his" attempts to answer my questions—at one session he got the names and sexes of my children wrong—originated from a source about which the only firm deduction possible is that apart from reading the Bond novels, it had made a close study of *The Life of Ian Fleming*, which was published two years after Ian's death.

The author of *Take Over* knew, more or less, what he was about; he had read enough of Ian's books to produce an instantly recognisable pastiche of a James Bond novel, and in the "service traffic" he often intervened to suppress earthly doubts, spoken or unspoken, about its authenticity—e.g., "Yes, dear, Mr Fleming is very pleased with the way the book is progressing and as he is writing it it must be his style, mustn't it?" and "I have been watching you reading bits out of one of Mr Fleming's books and know you are wondering whether our book is going to sound similar as regards the way of putting it. Mr Fleming says... he is confident it will be accepted by his publishers. Try not to worry dear." *Take Over* was submitted to Jona-

than Cape in November 1970 and, wisely, rejected.

Take Over, nevertheless, represents a semi-professional attempt at literary impersonation, carried out with great drive and fluency: 60,000 words transmitted in the spare moments of a busy woman during less than five months. The *soi-disant* Somerset Maugham, by contrast, makes no sense at all. In May 1970 he announced his purpose to produce "something which cannot conceivably be disputed as being my own work"; in January 1971 he was—to take a typical passage—writing: "Shy little snowdrops, their green tipped heads howled in deference heralding the coming of spring. Fresh green shoots appearing like magic on hushes and trees. Bulbs sprouting from the earth, soon transforming the bleakness into glowing colour and so on and on. Spirit A had at least done his home-work on Ian Fleming; Spirit B seems to be wholly unacquainted with the work of the author whose posthumous novel he (or more probably she) is master-minding.

WELL, THERE IT IS: THAT IS the story so far. Those who, unlike me, have studied the phenomenon of automatic writing, may be able to place rational explanations upon the sequence of events which I have described. All I can say about these events is that I found them curious: that their effects upon the earthly protagonists—Vera and her father—appeared to be stimulating and beneficial; and that I thought them worth recording.

Peter Fleming 1971

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I SOMETIMES torment myself by imagining that there is a little group of people, fellows of some college, who meet on Sunday mornings to score points on the number of inaccuracies they have detected in my article. They smoke pipes and argue whether to allow one of them a mark for an obvious misprint; they particularly enjoy a "howler" and it has occurred to me that they must by now be rather young, the "Stonehenge circle" of critical father-figures having run out. When I write of Septimius Severus I have him in mind. His stock is looking up. According to Gibbon "Posterity justly considered him as the principal author of the decline of the Roman Empire." I don't suppose many would agree today: his reign of eighteen years, the longest between Marcus Aurelius (d. 180) and 284 (Diocletian), seems in itself an impressive feat. We like him because he came from Africa, which makes a change from the Roman dynasties, and because he died at York with those admirable last words: "Omnia fuit et nihil exspecto." "I've been everything and what's the use?"

He would have seemed a terrible anti-climax after the Antonines had not Commodus been the last of them and Pertinax a had starter. Compared to the Big Five (Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius), he was an undistinguished little man, tyrannical in a small way, an up-and-down soldier, an embellisher with an arch in Rome to his credit. His last advice to his sons ("Do not disagree among

yourself, give money to the soldiers, and despise everyone else") is as stupid as it is brutal, coming from the man who had broken the power of the old Praetorian Guard.

What is there to be said for him? Anthony Birley, who is both historian and archaeologist, makes the best case he can. He himself is an exact and exacting scholar, with no graces. He does not make statements but hazards possibilities:

At all events, it would be curious indeed—though there is no means of proof—if the Septimii failed to take note of this cause célèbre, worthy indeed of the province of Africa, *nutricula caudiciformis*. Septimius himself would have the chance of hearing Apuleius at the trial of the great emperor, had he not already done so when the great man was in Tripolitania. . . . This would become in a bad historian the Septimii flung themselves wholeheartedly into the trial of the great emperor, nothing else was talked of for days. . . .

One of the accusers may have been a secret Christian, of whom Apuleius said: "He has never prayed to any God or frequented any temple. And if he happens to pass any shrine he regards it as a crime to raise his hand to his lips in token of reverence. His farm holds no shrine, no holy place, no grove" and Apuleius

A real encounter

A RAP ON RACE by Margaret Mead and James Baldwin/Michael Joseph £2.20

FREDERIC RAPHAEL

AGAINST the odds, this is a pretty marvellous book. Although Margaret Mead and James Baldwin are both extraordinary and "distinguished" people, one's heart sinks, going in, at yet another series of tape-recordings being passed off as a "major literary event." With any luck, you can't help thinking, a major literary event might still mean that someone had actually written a book, not merely been pressed between covers. Are we in for one more printed chat-show in which celebrities cudgel their brows into rugged seriousness and cook up another meal of chalk and cheese?

No, Baldwin and Mead really do argue about matters of substance and they really do listen to each other. Happily, we are spared the spurious interventions of a chairman, no tedious exegeses being passed off as a "major literary event." With any luck, you can't help thinking, a major literary event might still mean that someone had actually written a book, not merely been pressed between covers. Are we in for one more printed chat-show in which celebrities cudgel their brows into rugged seriousness and cook up another meal of chalk and cheese?

The two participants, because they are civilised and reasonable people, systematically rectify the balance of their arguments, as is alert to their own errors as to anyone else's and so demonstrate that the combination of eloquence and practical logic can still lead to the discovery of uncommon respect. Two human beings of different ages, colour and background move from the formality of a public recognition of each other's reputations towards a strictly personal candour. They move towards a kind of nakedness which is as unusual as it is moving, the vital nakedness of those who neither conceal their weaknesses nor deny their strengths.

Baldwin and Mead had never met (though doubtless they knew each other's work) before the day these conversations began. The edited version of their encounter lasts over 250 pages. It begins with a low-key but confident promise of disaster by Baldwin. He proclaims his black despair with all of that apocryphal instinct in the rhetoric of the church in which he was once a preacher. He has heard the arguments for hope—and shared them perhaps—too often to hear their rehearsal.

America, he says brisily, is doomed and with America, the world. The gross wounds inflicted by the white on the black have poisoned everything. We can only wait for the patient to die. All treatment is a waste of time, he argues with the weary ferocity of those who have harked an unanswerable case from one callous court to another.

Margaret Mead never denies the assault or ignores the wounds. She simply refuses, with growing assurance and sophistication, to accept the metaphysical conclusions which Baldwin's rage attaches to them. She concedes the often cruel and fatuous pretensions of the white man, but she cannot sentence the world to perdition. She refuses to deduce an inevitable future from what could not be avoided in the past. She will not, no, she will not be condemned for the crimes of others. She will not, no, she will not fall for the romantic association of "new somersets" (she is assailing) "insisting always on the concrete instance, she vindicates the tradition of the empirical: she will examine cases, she will judge individuals individually; she will not be a party to, still less a defendant in, any mass trials. She will, above all, have words mean something. She understands Baldwin as a man, but she will not show him the contempt involved in allowing illogicalities to pass unchecked.

The beauty of this long conflict reminds one sometimes of a game in which, when both contestants play well, they have more in common with each other than with their own supporters, sometimes of those passionate conversations at a beginning, a private place for these two people. Their discovery of each other as realities instructs us in the use of dialogue and reassures us, if of nothing else, of the value of intelligence, knowledge and, yes, good will.

Troubadour plus

THE FACT remains—if I may start at the end—that Tauber was the greatest of troubadours in our time, and that therefore any book on him is welcome, even this one. Its closing sentence gives a fair picture of its letter and spirit.

On January 20th (1948), at the end of a *Concert at the Albert Hall*... seven thousand friends rose to sing "You Are My Heart's Delight" with the Luten Girls Choir, as a tribute to a man whose voice had thrilled millions—and continues to do so.

For my own part, I'm not likely to sing "You Are My Heart's Delight" with the Luten Girls Choir, even in an emergency: I like my trash to have some music in it. Yet I can top Mr. Castle's story, if mine doesn't move you to tears, at least it will make you laugh. And I can put a date to it too.

On Saturday, September 27, 1947, a mere four months before the Luten Girls Choir went into action, I was sitting in front of my radio, listening to Don Giovanni from Covent Garden, when my friend, the great singer, was at the Garden drawing Tauber. I disliked Krips' interpretation, but there was the Vienna Philharmonic, and there were the singers. In particular, there was Tauber, whose *Dalio sua pace* proved an experience. But when it came to *Il mio tesoro intanto*, experience turned into revelation. My mother, a fine musician, was working next door. I shouted: "Drop everything, come in and listen!" I needed a witness—who, in fact, was just as stunned: she'd only known of Tauber as a singer of dreadful music. But his phrasing of the Mozart aria, burning and crystalline at the same time, cut into one's ears, for ever: I remember every note.

One does hear breathless difficulties—which themselves were turned to creative advantage, even in the semiquaver coloura-

tures, enhancing their urgency.

Later, my wife reported that when he came back into the wings, he was soaked in sweat and looked very ill. From Mr. Castle's book, which is not without documentary value, I now learn that he was, in fact, dying. One lung was virtually out of action, the other gravely affected—the unsuccessful operation impending.

I am going to sing... I will sing in the world will stop me. Afterwards they can do what they like with me.

In the whole history of music, I know of two great artists with great banality in them. Mahler solved the problem by treating his compulsive vulgarisms as material for his inspired creative irony. Tauber, on the one hand, sang music compared to which "You are my heart's delight" is late Beethoven—while on the other hand, when he sang sublime music, his natural taste was more convincing than are many a high-brow's artistic living standards, painfully acquired. The clearest yet, condensation—dichotomy in his musical character invites psychological investigation. Meanwhile, Charles Castle's own study is sustained, disarming, Kitzsch, not over-literate, and fittingly adorned with such words as "Salzburg" with a "t" and, of course, "artists" with an "s". Peter God died out Tauber for this treatment because, of all great spirits, his is the last to mind.

The Emperor who died at York

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS by Anthony Birley/Eyre & Spottiswoode
£5.50 pp 398

CYRIL CONNOLLY

calls this way of life "lucifugus," light-shunning, using a word used by the Christian writer, Minucius Felix, for his sect "laetitia et lucifuga natio."

The Septimii were very rich, and their money opened the Roman career system to them. The future Emperor had military ability and there were omens to prove he would one day rule. His African accent was not too exaggerated. (Africans dropped their altheas and mispronounced the letter "L.") He was small but physically powerful, a horn administrator, a man of great energy and used to roughing it. He was trained as a lawyer and conducted his own defence against a charge of adultery. He soon became a Senator.

Mr Birley gives a good picture of the reign of Commodus, "born in the purple," whose appointment was the most glaring mistake made by his father, Marcus Aurelius. It is difficult to assess the harm which a totally lascivious exhibitionist, however cruel and cowardly, can do to an institution like the Roman Empire. They degrade morality, they empty the ex-

chequer, but they are bound to be murdered fairly soon, and the harm is really done by gross errors of judgment such as disbanding armies or appeasing barbarians, crippling taxation or corrupt bureaucracy. After the Antonines every emperor had to bribe his supporters, go off and defeat his rivals, campaign against the barbarians and await assassination. It is a wonder anyone was prepared to take on the job.

An emperor is as famous as the historians he gets, and Severus (I shall call him SS) had a good one, Cassius Dio (who wrote in Greek), and two indictments. Much light has recently been thrown on him by inscriptions. His greatest achievement to my thinking was his complex of buildings in Leptis Magna, the colonnaded street and the Forum. The colonnaded arch and the facade of the Basilica are alone worth the journey to this land of trigger-happy oil men.

In Rome his arch stands, but an interesting new building, the

Septimodion has vanished. It stood one hundred feet high and three hundred feet long, resembled a *Nymphaeum* or a theatrical drop curtain, and contained statues of the seven planetary gods, with himself as the sun looking towards Africa and welcoming fellow Texans. I mean men from Leptis. He also restored the Pantheon.

His was not a very literary age. There were Apuleius and Fronto, but the great men were jurists like Ulpian and Papinian, and the physician Galen. The Emperor took a keen interest in the administration of justice and was particularly strict in enforcing the law against adultery, of which there were three thousand cases pending when the elderly tyrant hurried off to win military glory against the Sarmatae. The victims must have breathed a sigh of relief. The last case was a conspiracy. An informer against the proconsul Apronianus, accused of dreaming that he would be emperor, mentioned that he had seen "a half-headed senator peeping in." According to Dio:

We all looked round at the men who were told I was so taken aback that I actually felt the hair on my head with my fingers. A good many others found themselves doing likewise. The Emperor's campaigns in Britain were remarkable. He found Hadrian's wall inadequate

and marched up to Aberdeenshire to establish an important camp at Carpow, on the Tay which Anthony Birley knew well. "There can be little doubt that Septimius intended to annex a substantial portion of not the whole of Scotland." Septimius decided on a campaign of extermination, right down to the last male baby. He died at York in 211 and was cremated, his ashes being placed in an urn of "purple stone" (Dio's blue John). He handled the urn himself and said: "You will hold a man that the world could not hold."

His sons were soon fighting, and if we like to memorise twenty-four Caesars instead of the usual twelve—they bring up the tail. Antoninus murdered Geta, and reigned five years as Caracalla, who made all free inhabitants of the Empire Roman citizens before he was murdered by Marcus, who reigned fourteen months to make way for Heliogabalus ("it would be inaccurate or oversimplified to describe him as a homosexual") and after him came the last of the dynasty, Alexander Severus, who got it down to 235 when he was murdered by his troops.

The Severan dynasty had lasted forty-two years and perhaps its principal character was a woman, the Empress Julia Domna, chosen as second wife by SS because her horoscope said she would be a queen. She was beautiful and intelligent, and the persecution from various favourites drove her to her friend and philosopher, in particular Philostratus, untrustworthy biographer of the incredible Mage, Apollonius of Tyana.

On the touchline

MY LAST DUCHESS by Iain Crichton Smith/Gollancz £1.60

KRUMMAGEL by Peter Ustinov/Heinemann £2.10

THE OMNIVORERS by J P Donleavy/Eyre & Spottiswoode £1.75

JULIAN SYMONS

A MAN in his early forties, whose wife has just left him, pays a visit to see a famous ageing novelist named Frith, looking for what? He hardly knows, except that Frith's early novels seem to him full of anguished passionate wisdom.

The great man turns out to be conscientiously spruce, neat and elegant. He is at first under the impression that his visitor is a don who wants to write a thesis, and makes it clear that the early work is of comparatively slight interest. Later Frith's stepson appears. He is an efficient bureaucratic educationist, and the two engage delightedly in mildly malicious self-important gossip. The visitor steals away.

This opening passage in Iain Crichton Smith's *My Last Duchess* is full of delicate and subtle ironies. It is the keynote of a book about a man who has always looked in literature for the emotional involvements from which he finches in life. His wife had been one of the students in his English class at a teachers' training college in Scotland. He overheard her by his witty whimsical asides about Elliot in particular and English literature in general, but after marriage their emotional intimacy lessens rather than increases. She turns to a variety of good works, he criticises everything she does in a detached, dandy way. In the standard letter left on the mantelpiece she accuses him of being totally untrue. One of the book's last scenes shows him shrinking from the chance to prevent an act of violence which would involve him in personal risk.

This is an admirably paced, finely controlled and intelligent novel. A slightly upbeat ending is provided in which the hero decides that he will immerse in the destructive element of life, will no longer be "the aloof ridiculous backward man." This seems a bit of an illusion, and perhaps is meant to be so. Some play the game, others watch it, and Mr Crichton Smith's unhappy hero is an eternal spectator whose romantic dreams are never in danger of coming true.

Everything creative that Peter Ustinov does—plays, short stories, and now this novel—Krummagel seems somehow to belong to the diversions of good table talk. An idea occurs to him and he plays with it, turning it this way and that, reflecting on its possibilities wittily, comically, seriously. Then somehow it has disappeared, and another idea has taken its place. He reflects on it wittily, comically, seriously. . . .

All this makes for entertainment in a novel as in his plays. Bartram T. Krummagel is a home-made American police chief who is given a testimonial luncheon plus tickets for a round-the-world tour. In an English village Krummagel becomes involved in a ridiculous argument about politics with Jock, the local nutty Communist, interprets a search for a handkerchief as reaching for a gun and shoots



Iain Crichton Smith: delicate and subtle ironies

first, getting his man. He is astonished and indignant to find himself arrested, tried, given a seven-year sentence for manslaughter. He serves part of the sentence and then his escape is connived at by an embarrassed Director of Public Prosecutions. Krummagel returns home, finds his job and his wife both gone, and takes his revenge in the only meaningful way to him, with a gun.

Lots of this is funny, from the opening testimonial luncheon, through the slanging match in the pub, to Krummagel's rejection of the possibilities of escape from an open prison because he is so happy working on their new scheme. But the book is meant to be a novel of ideas, and on this plane one can't take it seriously. Krummagel does not end, as the hunch would have us believe, as a tragic figure of innocence cynically betrayed. He starts life as a caricature and he ends that way, the central figure in an often brilliant series of comic sketches about the absurdities of justice and the law.

J. P. Donleavy's testicular farce reminded me of a Donald McGill cartoon. A grinning salesman in a joke shop is balancing three balls on the ends of three fingers and saying: "You should have seen the trick I played on the last night." The balls are *Claw Eaters* is about Clayton Claw Eaters Cleomeout of The Three Glands, whose triple testicles arouse curiosity in everybody. In his Irish home, Charnel Castle, they are discussed, displayed, admired, utilised. A collection of comic sketches, the IRA man, Nails McSoftie, the man, and people with names like Lead Kindly Light, Franz Decibel Pickle and George Putlog Roulette play out scenes which seem in debt to the Goon Show, Monty Python and Terry Southern.

Some of these come off, many are dismal failures. Among the successes are a confessional scene, and another in which Lead Kindly Light wearing armour tries to prick Tor the bull with his lance. But these are sight jokes, not verbal ones, and after all why not watch Monty Python?

No One Writes To The Colonel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez translated from the Spanish by J. S. Bernstein (Cape, £1.50). A collection of stories set in the Colombian town of Macondo, where nobody is more than half alive. The Colonel of the title is a dreamer, his novel work of past half a century ago and waits for a State pension that never comes, a prentice thief finds nothing to steal from the pool room except the unsalable billiard balls and gets caught when he tries to put them back. Autocratic Big Mama dies and a vision of revolt stirs feebly. Life is nasty, brutish and—except for the 100-year-old senescent priest—short. Marquez is Latin America's most powerful writer and these hard stories reflect faithfully the sordid human situation in a rotting autocracy.

A Short Walk in Williams Park by C. H. B. Kitchen. With a Foreword by L. P. Hartley (Chatto & Windus, £1.50). C. H. B. Kitchen wrote some interesting Golden Age detective stories, and a number of novels among which the recently reprinted *The Auctioneer* is the best known. This short posthumously published work, which has an affectionate introduction by L. P. Hartley, is about an insatiably curious elderly business man who involves himself in the love affair of limp unhappy married Edward and forceful Miranda, and solves their problems by sympathy plus a little guile. A minor work of pastel-coloured mild pleasantness, it does point to a certain lack of narrative energy in almost all of Kitchen's work as a novelist.

Vital statistics

The human race has now accumulated sufficient nuclear explosive to eliminate itself 50,000 times over. If present trends continue, about 400 million people will be killed in wars in the next 50 years. One fifth of world scientific manpower is now employed by the military at a cost of over 200,000 million dollars a year. Robin Clarke marshals some alarming statistics in *The Science of War and Peace* (Cape, £2.95). Editor of the *Science Journal* for five years, he has long been fascinated by the corrupting influence of military research on science. His first book, *We All Fall Down*, considered chemical and biological warfare; *The Science of War and Peace* examines the extent to which man's military obsessions are ruining his chances for solving the pressing global problems of pollution and poverty. The *Daily Telegraph* said the book was "fascinating reading...Mr Clarke's chapters on the science of peace are as thorough as those on war and present much novel and fascinating material."

IN MY FASHION

PANTING AFTER FASHION

by Ernestine Carter



CHRISTOPHER McDONNELL, who Peter Harrison, opened their shop in Sloane Avenue four years ago. Two years later they moved a larger one in South Street. Christopher, not, good-looking and twenty-five, was a Royal College of Art Ironside product 1962/65, same vintage as Ossie Clark. He was the RCA he had been at Stafford College of Art where studied graphics. In his last year, however, his interest in fashion took over. There was, I mean, at that time a department of fashion at Stafford but students and he was the first son there to take a diploma in fashion. When he left the RCA, went for a year to Queen's College, then to London College of Fashion as Fashion Editor. Then

he decided to start his own business. What made his collection exciting was its courage. It takes courage to make a positive statement. Instead of doing what he piously hoped his clients would like, Christopher McDonnell did what he thought was right. This integrity was what made me admire him. He makes me admire Yves Saint Laurent, with whom Christopher McDonnell shares a wave-length. I may not agree with what they do, but I admire them for doing it. It takes courage to introduce a young co-designer. Who had heard of Yves Saint Laurent until Christopher Dior died? For that matter, few had heard of Dior

until he left Lelong. Christopher McDonnell gave twenty-three-year-old Richard Nott a prime spot at a peak show time. It takes courage, too, to produce a collection based on a single colour: Christopher's a deep pewter grey. Richard's a chocolate brown. Although both, like nearly everybody else, dodge the skirt length issue by emphasising pants (theirs are wide Oxford bags with turn-ups) when skirts are shown, they are firmly maxi. Only John Bates has made such a determined stand. Fashion has become nervous. Designers have become tentative and unsure. Courage is what separates the men from the boys, the designers from the dress makers.



LEFT, by Richard Nott for Morrison-McDonnell: chocolate tunic, leather belted, the wide three-quarter sleeves showing the sleeves of the cream silk shirt; matching cream crepe trousers. CENTRE, by Christopher McDonnell for Morrison-McDonnell: moss jacket and trousers in powder gaberdine, shirt in grey voile printed in white, worn with a pewter

gaberdine mid raincoat, deeply pleated, the jacket long and patent belted, the narrow knee-length skirt maxi overskirted. The georgette shirt is printed in orange Staffordshire knots (Christopher McDonnell's school insignia) especially for him by Simon. Hats by Molyard. Available the beginning of October at Morrison-McDonnell. Prices over from £30 to £50.

ANYONE who likes the kind of heat that only mad dogs and Englishmen (and journalists) go out in can be sure that the last two weeks in July will be sweltering. These are the weeks that the couture houses in London, Rome and Paris show their autumn/winter collections. Last week, not a scorcher, but quite hot enough, two members of the dwindling Incorporated

Society of London Fashion Designers, Hardy Amies and Clive showed to the Press. The ISLFD will divide even further, for Clive is closing his House at the end of the month. This makes Christopher McDonnell's talented collection, also shown last week, the more important. The ready-to-wear, not the couture, is where the action is today.



CLIVE did a ripple through of prototypes: an assemblage of coats for men and women, long and short, in Borg, the most interesting in a shaggy pile they call "goat"; a group of jersey and Ban-lon dresses inset with abstract patterns in Jordan almond colours. It is not, he says, a collection but a kind of sampling, for although he is closing his couture business, he will continue as design consultant. Above, palest grey Borg "goat" yoked in matching Duskin (Schlaepfer's suede fabric); Duskin trousers.



HARDY AMIES, as designed by Ken Fleetwood, shows more skirts than trousers, the lengths variable. Suits have long jackets, usually belted, and there is lots of fur trim. Long tweed skirts are topped with satin blouses in racing colours. Most interesting are the coats, flaring from narrow tops, their tight armholes outlined in contrasting fabric. Rayne's wedge soles (will there be a heel left?) glitter with rhinestones. Above, coat in white spotted brown vinyl, lined in fake calf, the armholes outlined in brown jersey; printed calf shirt, brown jersey trousers.

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KEEPING UP

With pants. Unless Paris comes up with a new idea (and about time too), it looks as if skirts will be as rare as beels. Far right is a preview from Irene Galitzine's collection which she will show in Rome tomorrow night: a typically couture trouser suit. Near right is bow the young see pants. The smartest thing is to own a second-hand pair of real American workman's dungarees, the baggier the better, the shabbier the chicier. Next best is to buy a pair and shabby them up yourself. Eric Doman sketched the Annacat version, designed by Lesley Poole, metal clipped, with side and backside pockets, plus a loop for a hammer. £10.95. That, however, is just for starters. My Eye on Youth, Lucy Oppé, adds the necessary regalia: on the bib, a scattering of enamel badges—Superman, Rupert Bear, an aeroplane (all from Mr Freedom), a train (from Boston-151), and an applique fabric medallion illustrating "The Folk that Live on the Hill"; on one back pocket, another applique of a hamburger from Mr Freedom. And she wears hers with a deeply scoop-necked pink tank shirt by Sonia Rykiel.

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